

# Western Australian Bird Notes

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Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

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## BARN SWALLOW AT THOMSONS LAKE

A flock of about 200 swallows at Thomsons Lake on 8/1/86 included one bird which stood out as being different from all the rest. Pauline Clay, Clive and Glen Woodhead and I all noticed that this one bird was darker above than the Welcome Swallows and had a dark band separating a chestnut throat from a white breast and belly. On this basis I identified the bird as a Barn Swallow.

This was an exciting find as it seems to be the first record for the South-west of Western Australia. Apart from a single record in 1860, the Barn Swallow was not recorded in Australia until Peter Slater found it at Derby in 1960 (*West Aust. Nat.* 8:33-36). Since then it has been found to be regular migrant to northern Australia. The eastern subspecies of the Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica gutturalis* breeds in Mongolia, China and Japan and migrates to the south-east Asian region, with small numbers of birds reaching northern Australia. In recent years, birds have been seen further south, and in increasing numbers, e.g. about 200 birds seen at Broome by Brice Wells on 3 January 1986, plus regular sightings by others at Dampier and Port Hedland. It is not known whether the species is expanding its range or whether the greater number of experienced observers is resulting in the greater number of reported sightings.



Photograph by Barbara Porter

*Barn Swallows have been recognised as regular visitors to northern Australia for many years. Reports from coastal towns in Western Australia have culminated in a recent sighting at Thomsons Lake in Perth.*

Observations on the Thomsons Lake bird, which was present until at least 11/1/86, showed that the Barn Swallow is quite easy to distinguish from the Welcome Swallow. In comparison with the Welcome Swallow, the Barn Swallow shows much more contrast in its plumage. The bird we observed was darker and glossier above, and much whiter below than the Welcome Swallows. If seen at the right angle, the Barn Swallow could be distinguished in flight even up to 100 metres away. When seen closer, it was also obvious that the forehead and throat were chestnut, different to the paler rufous of the Welcome Swallows. The distinct black band separating the chestnut of the throat from the white of the breast was clear. The band was slightly less distinct in the centre, which is consistent with the bird being of the subspecies *gutturalis* of Barn Swallow. The tail of the Thomsons Lake bird was shorter than that of the Welcome Swallows, and was presumably in moult, as normally the Barn Swallow has the longer tail. When the tail was fanned, it showed larger white spots than in the Welcome Swallow.

This bird was quite vocal, and was singing much more than any of the Welcome Swallows. The Barn Swallow song was similar in pattern to that of the Welcome Swallows, but a little deeper in tone.

Next time you see a swallow, take a second look - you, too, may be lucky enough to find a Barn Swallow.

Allan Burbidge

## THE GREAT DUCK COUNT

Waterbird enthusiasts in Western Australia have the opportunity to participate in an important new adventure - THE GREAT DUCK COUNT. This is an initiative of R.A.O.U. Waterbird Usage Studies, which recently received funding from the Department of Conservation and Land Management for waterbird studies over the next three years.

THE GREAT DUCK COUNT has two objectives:

- (1) to monitor annual changes in populations of waterfowl in Western Australia, and
- (2) to identify sites that are important as refuges for waterfowl.

Data collected for the recently completed South-West Waterbird Project confirmed the importance of many nature reserves for waterfowl (ducks, swans and coots), and led to recognition of the importance of other reserves that were not previously thought valuable for waterfowl. In THE GREAT DUCK COUNT, these sites will be visited, as well as known important sites not in reserves.

Participants will be supplied with maps (based on blocks of latitude and longitude) and will be asked to find and survey a sample of the wetlands shown on these maps, including farm

dams. This will ensure that we cover a representative sample of wetland types throughout south-western Australia, resulting in a more complete assessment of numbers than has ever been possible. Additional important wetlands will undoubtedly be discovered.

By repeating this comprehensive count each year, long-term changes in the population of each species can be monitored and appropriate conservation measures enacted if consistent declines are detected.

In 1986, the GREAT DUCK COUNT will be held from  
**8 March to 16 March**  
(incorporating two weekends)

Volunteers who have continued routine monitoring of water-bird usage of wetland nature reserves will be the backbone of the THE GREAT DUCK COUNT observer force. In March, these observers will be counting waterfowl and other waterbirds as part of their routine monitoring. In addition, the Waterbirds Officer and waterbird research officers of C.A.L.M. will participate.

To fill the many gaps in coverage, other participants - both country and city-based - will be required to join the 1986 GREAT DUCK COUNT. This is a once-off commitment, though repeat surveys of sites by the same observers in subsequent years would be most effective.

**PLEASE RING OR WRITE TO ROGER JAENSCH**  
at the R.A.O.U. Office  
(phone 09 364 6202 - 24 hrs)  
if you think that you can assist us.

Previous experience with counting waterbirds would be helpful but is not essential. It is however imperative that observers be committed to obtaining TOTAL COUNTS of ducks, swans and coots present at the wetland on the survey day. This entails tackling wetlands that are not too difficult to cover (leave them to the Waterbirds Officer!), and devoting enough time and energy to fully investigate the wetland during the survey.

Counts of waterbirds other than ducks, swans and coots will be accepted for entry in the Waterbird Usage Data Bank but are not first priority in THE GREAT DUCK COUNT. Such information should be entered on standard waterbird usage data sheets which are available from Roger Jaensch.

Large estuaries, complex open lakes, water storage bodies and a selection of farm dams will be surveyed from the air, to supplement our ground coverage and incorporate wetland types not investigated in previous R.A.O.U. surveys.

Simple data forms will be used for recording counts. Data will be entered from these forms into a computer and a report will be published as soon as possible after the count period. Complimentary copies of the Report of THE GREAT DUCK COUNT will be made available to all participants.

Why concentrate on waterfowl? Ducks, swans and coots are among the most numerous and conspicuous of our waterbirds. Counts of waterfowl produce readily usable results that reflect the values of wetlands for fauna. Changes in waterfowl numbers may be indicative of changes in the health of a particular wetland or deterioration of wetlands throughout south-western Australia.

**WOULD YOU MISS OUT**  
on the challenge & excitement of  
**THE GREAT DUCK COUNT?**

Contact me NOW and indicate:

- \* your address and phone numbers;
- \* do you want to survey a particular wetland?  
- if so, which wetland?
- \* if willing to be directed to wetlands, how far would you be prepared to travel?

**Roger Jaensch**

## COMING MEETINGS

In 1986, more meetings will be held than in previous years. Meetings will normally be held on the fourth Monday of each month, at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre. The Centre is off Flynn Street, Wembley, near the intersection with Selby Street. Meetings will commence at 8:00 pm, though doors will generally be open soon after 7:30 pm. The June meeting will be earlier in the month than usual.

Two types of meeting have been planned for 1986. Meetings in March, June and September will have an invited speaker and a short session of business. The other ('informal') meetings will be chaired by various people who will organise the programme around a particular topic. The last third of each 'informal' meeting will be available for members to talk about their interests, observations or trips.

**Monday 24 March - Dr Brian Collins : sunbirds**

**Monday 28 April - Informal : sound recording**

**Monday 26 May - Informal : seabirds**

**Monday 16 June - Roger Jaensch : waterbirds**

Roger will review important discoveries made in R.A.O.U. surveys of waterbirds in Western Australia since 1981. Results of the 1986 Great Duck Count will also be presented.

## COMING EXCURSIONS

**Saturday 8 March - Boyagin Rock**

In 1986 we plan to make several visits to the absorbing Boyagin Rock Nature Reserve. The Rock is approximately 110 km ESE of the Perth G.P.O. and is reached via the Brookton Highway. The reserve contains impressive stands of powder-bark wandoo woodland and probably supports similar bird species to Dryandra Forest. One of our objectives will be to compile lists of species found at particular sites in the different seasons.

Meet just past the intersection of the Brookton Highway and Canning Road, Karragullen at 07:30.

**Saturday 8 March to Sunday 16 March - THE GREAT DUCK COUNT**

See full details elsewhere in this issue.

**Sunday, 16 March - Bold Park**

Bold Park encompasses some excellent bushland, as well as Perry Lakes which are renowned for their birdlife. Following an evening barbeque, this excursion will carry on into the night in search of nocturnal birds. Meet at 4.30 pm at the car park between Perry Lakes. Organised by Park Ranger Barry Connell and Ron Van Delft.

**Friday 4 April to Monday 7 April - Bird Banding Workshop**

A bird banding workshop is being organised at Perup, NE of Manjimup. Accommodation in dormitories or bring your own tent. Water and cooking facilities available. A charge of \$3.00 per day will be made to cover the cost of insurance, hire of equipment, etc.. Banders, Would-be-Banders and their families welcome. A good opportunity to learn bird banding in relaxed surroundings. Contact the Regional Organiser of the Bird Banding Scheme, Perry de Rebeira, 12 Glenwood Ave, Glen Forrest 6071.

**Saturday, 12 April - Claughton Reserve**

The reserve combines river, wetland and bush habitat and a good number of species is usual. Meet at the Swan River end of Katanning Street, Bayswater at 8.30. Leader - Tony Crookes.

**3-11 May - Eyre trip**

See notes under 'Eyre Bird Observatory'.

### **Saturday, 3 May - Blue Gum Lake**

This excursion is primarily for Young Ornithologists but all are welcome at another interesting "inner" metropolitan water and bush-bird area. Identification of birds will be the prime objective and high school aged children will be particularly welcome. The lake can be reached by bus from Perth Stand 34, route 105 departing 0908 changing to route 108 at Booragoon at 0930, getting off near the corner of Canning and Moolyean Roads. The route 108 bus leaves Blue Gum Lake about 1100 for a return to Perth arriving there at 1147. For those with own transport meet at the Moolyean Road end of the lake at 09.45. Leader - Ron Van Delft.

### **Saturday, 10 May - Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve**

Meet at the reserve's carpark on the north side of Russell Road, Success (between Hammond Rd and Pearse Rd) at 3:30 pm. Always a rewarding area, reliable for Red-capped Parrots, Whistling Kites and other bush and lake birds.

### **Sunday 15 June - Point Walter Reserve**

The Point Walter Reserve covers a large area and has been surveyed by several metro-birders each of whom is familiar with a section and the territories of birds within them. Meet at 08.30 at the car park in Burke Drive just past where Carroll Road leads off Burke Drive.

### **Sunday, 15 June - seabirds**

From vantage points on *terra firma* (instead of boat afloat) to see skuas, petrels, jaegers and albatrosses. Meet at the west sea end of North Mole, Fremantle at 8:00 am. Leader - Steve Keeling.

### **CAMPOUT : 22 - 28 June - Kathleen Valley**

A week long camp is being organised at Kathleen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, north of Agnew. Accommodation in the old shearing shed; bring own cutlery, crockery, sleeping necessities. Tents are not permitted. Plenty of water available. It is planned to organise food on a communal basis. Interested persons give your name and telephone number to the R.A.O.U. Office. Leader - Geoff Shannon.

## **MEETING REPORT**

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The RAOU W.A. Group Annual General Meeting was held on 20 January 1986 at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre. A good attendance of about eighty members elected the following Committee for 1986.

Chairman:	Geoff Shannon
Vice Chairman:	Rosalind Denny
Treasurer:	Clive Napier
Secretary:	Shapelle McNee
Committee:	Mandy Bamford
	Brian Collins
	Bob Goodale
	Barbara Hale
	John Hansen
	Brian Wilson

## **EXCURSION REPORTS**

### **McDOUGALL PARK - 19 January 1985**

The day had been hot but it was nice and cool by 5.30 pm at the park. A casual stroll around turned up an impressive number of species and the lake provided us with a surprise. Apart from there being no mosquitoes at the barbeque following the walk, two Black-fronted Plover paraded at close range before us. Har-

thead, Willy Wagtail and Little Black Cormorant also showed themselves off.

About three quarters of the 30 or so people who came for the walk stayed on for the barbeque. We left about 7.30 pm leaving others to help consume the contents of a sherry bottle being passed around!

Thanks to Joy Fleay who ensured the smooth flow of the evening's programme.

Ron and Catherine Van Delft.

### **TWERTUP (Fitzgerald River National Park) - 24 to 27 January 1986**

On this bus trip eighteen members enjoyed the comforts of Kevin Coate's air-conditioned coach on the seven-hour journey via Jerramungup. Once arrived at the Twertup Field Studies Centre we appreciated Kevin's efficient catering, his spotting skills and his botanical knowledge as well.

Among the 61 species seen within 7 km of the Centre, were two new records (subject to vetting) for the Park:- Gilbert's Whistler (two adults and one young) were clearly seen and Regent Parrots, on two occasions. Twenty four Fork-tailed Swifts were seen flying over the centre and breakaway on a clear, fine afternoon. We were pleased to have frequent glimpses of Shy Hylacola and close-ups of the Southern Scrub-robins. Some saw a Malleefowl, an Australian Owlet Nightjar was flushed from a hollow tree and a Spotted Nightjar from a crevice. A male Blue-breasted Fairy-wren was seen feeding an immature Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo, and the nest and eggs of a Brush Bronzewing were found. Eight species of honeyeaters were seen feeding noisily in the moorts (E. platypus) and some of us had their first sight of Purple-gaped Honeyeaters.

The clear, hot days were spent in long walks on the sandtracks around the Centre yet certain ladies emerged cool and elegant at the end of the day after 'bush bathing' in pudding basins and pint-pots. The company was most congenial and old-world courtesy never failed; even when we trampled over each other to have a good look at Southern Emu-wrens in the heath. An apologetic 'I do beg your pardon' was overheard!

There was general hilarity and a few grazed knees as we stumbled over the scree-covered slopes each night with our spotlights looking for honey possums. On the last evening a beautiful full moon shone over the spongolite cliffs as Kevin's delicious damper rose in the coals for our supper, concluding a most pleasant and relaxing weekend.

Diane Beckingham

### **VASSE ESTUARY SURVEY - 24 & 25 January 1986**

This rather hastily-organised event was undertaken in difficult conditions which understandably contributed to the low number of participants. During the survey, temperatures were in the low forties in the water-bag and evening sea-breezes were elusive.

Nevertheless, the seven who ventured forth were treated to a spectacular assembly of waterbirds in the drying Vasse and Wonnerup Estuaries. A total of 33,000 waterbirds was seen, most birds being congregated between the mouths of the Sabina and Abba Rivers. A higher tally of individuals was only recorded once during the Waterbird Project (1981-85) - 41,000 at Peel Inlet in November 82.

Sixty species were identified over two days. The majority were seen on the Saturday which meant that a rare situation arose - counts had to be entered on three data sheets! Observers split into three groups to tackle sections of the wetland simultaneously.

Our campsite beside the outlet channel was a particularly rewarding spot. A family of two adult Buff-banded Rails with two fluffy black chicks probed the mud at close range and Fork-tailed Swifts drifted low overhead, borne up by a hot NE breeze. We awoke one morning to find Great Egrets lining the edges of the channel for as far as we could see. Sacred Kingfishers fed juveniles in a grove of Casuarinas and Grey Butcherbirds chortled melodiously.

Highlights of the waterbird survey included abundant species such as the Grey Teal (7000), Black-winged Stilt (5000), Red-necked Avocet (4000), Eurasian Coot (4000) and Sharp-tailed

Sandpiper (2300). The tally of 170 Great Egrets did not exceed the previous best Vasse count (237) but the total of 120 Yellow-billed Spoonbills has probably never before been achieved in surveys in south-western Australia. A single Royal Spoonbill was sighted.

An impressive total of 23 species of waders was realised! Rarer species included the Pectoral Sandpiper (3) and Black-tailed Godwit (18). We were astonished to make a record South-West tally of 61 Wood Sandpipers, most being found in stony marsh along Malbup Creek. A strong-flying *Gallinago* snipe was flushed six times: this was one of three sightings on the coastal plain this summer.

Perhaps the most important discovery was of 44 Long-toed Stints scattered in mud with short grass or stunted samphire in Vasse Estuary. Had we been a week or two earlier, greater areas of this typical Long-toed habitat would have been available. This tally was the third highest ever made in southern Australia for this secretive wader.

As a result of more than 60 surveys by regular observers and this recent survey, the Vasse-Wonnerup Estuarine System now stands as one of the five most important wetlands in southern W.A. A follow-up visit on 1 February added the Ruff and two other species to bring the overall total to 71 species - this has only been exceeded at Alfred Cove (72 species).

Most importantly, 19 species listed in the Japan-Australia Migratory and Endangered Birds Agreement have now been found at the Vasse. Also, more than 10,000 ducks have been counted at the Vasse in two successive years: if this proves to be an annual event, the Estuary would satisfy a criterion for nomination as a Wetland of International Importance.

Roger Jaensch

#### NEERABUP NATIONAL PARK - 8 February 1985

I would rather go birdwatching than shopping on a Saturday morning and it seems that at least 15 people agreed with me on 8 February. We met by the shore of Lake Joondalup and headed for Neerabup National Park. Between us we saw 32 species including White-backed Swallows and Splendid Fairy-wren.

Neerabup seems to be a place well worth a visit. On the Thursday prior to the excursion I saw a flock of about 70 White-backed Swallows, but alas only two or three were there on Saturday. Geoff Shannon had the good fortune to see a Golden Whistler feeding young and a quail. During the first six months of the Perth Metropolitan Bird Project only one record of the Golden Whistler was noted on the Swan Coastal Plain, although they are common in the Darling Range.

The party then traveled north to Nowergup Lake whose western shore lies in the Nowergup Nature Reserve which abuts Neerabup National Park. Almost all types of duck found in W.A. were present, as well as Red-necked Avocet, one Greenshank, Black-fronted Plover and a flock of about 12 Banded Stilt!

By the time Nowergup Lake had been surveyed it was getting hot, so the final leg, wading through the mud to see the waders at Jandabup, was abandoned.

A pleasant time was had by all and a warm welcome to some members of the newly formed Wanneroo Naturalists Club who attended.

Ron and Catherine Van Delft

#### HARTFIELD PARK - 9 February 1985

A small group of early risers assembled at Hartfield Park, Forestfield at 7 am on Sunday the 9th of February for a walk around the golf course.

I am pleased to report that most of the birds recorded at the location were seen and several new ones were added. The total species list was 26.

For some reason the early morning golfers stayed at home, so the birders had an uninterrupted stroll down the course.

It was noticeable that many of the birds seemed tame and some close up observations were made. Perhaps the birds are used to golfers more interested in birdies than birds!

David Row

## CONSERVATION SUB-COMMITTEE

Our last issue reported the appointment of Brian Wilson as Convenor of a Conservation Sub-committee. The aim is to draw up a list of places of ornithological importance in W.A. in the categories of top, middle and lower.

Brian is making contact with appropriate Government Departments. From the conservation view point the protection of Crown land is potentially easier than of private property but important bird areas in each are required, particularly as private property owners are increasingly aware of their role in conservation.

Please send in your suggestions with brief reasons for your nomination either to the RAOU office or direct to Brian Wilson, 46 Farrant Street, Gooseberry Hill 6076.

Brian has commenced a large and difficult undertaking which when complete will be of great value to all bird watchers. Suggestions please.

## METRO BIRDER

A special edition of Metro Birder News was recently sent to all metro birders with some rather exciting news. The RAOU has succeeded in obtaining a publisher for a guide to birdwatching in Perth and more importantly some 90% of the funds required to write and publish it.

University of Western Australia Press will publish the guide and we hope to have it selling for between \$7.00 to \$9.00 before Christmas.

A full list of those who contributed financially to funding the writing and publishing of the guide will appear in it. However, special thanks must be extended to those who have contributed to date. These include Mr Dallas Dempster, the University of Western Australia Press, the Department of Conservation and Environment, the Department of Conservation and Land Management, the Bird Observers Club, the Australian Bird Environment Fund and many generous people who have sponsored pages.

It is most heartening to see Australia's two major bird organisations, the Bird Observers Club and the RAOU giving support to the Perth Metropolitan Bird Project.

It is hoped that publication will raise awareness of the sites and value of good bird habitat in the Metropolitan area and foster a caring attitude by the public and the government organisations responsible for the sites. Conservation of bird habitat depends on people. Publication should also help stimulate interest in birdwatching and the RAOU.

There is still plenty of work to be done. In particular, if any RAOU member has MAPPING SKILLS please give me a call. The mapping can be done at home during weekends and involves drawing maps from aerial photographs using a standard legend.

The RAOU office volunteers have been doing an excellent job. Work that I thought would take days has been done in one or two mornings! I hope that this trend will continue as an estimated 800 forms require to be entered into the computer and checked.

The analysis of the 2000 computer forms sent in by metrobirders over the last twelve months will provide an important insight into bird distribution and movement in Perth. The preliminary analysis, reported in the September edition of W.A. Bird Notes produced a number of surprises but also left many tantalising questions which will only be answered by more data.

A full account must await the guide, but it is hoped to have more items of interest in the next WA Bird Notes.

Ron Van Delft  
(Project Officer)

## THREE PARK SEARCH

This year's Three Park Search provided interesting insights into human behaviour as well as interesting information on birds!

Eight teams participated and reported a total of 119 species between them.

TABLE ONE - Number of visiting teams and number of species for each site.

Site	No of visiting teams	No of species
Yanchep	1	16
Thompsons Lake	2	60
Herdsmen Lake	7	57
Bold Park	3	56
Kings Park	2	41
Alfred Cove	7	60
Kalamunda N.P.	2	29

Table One shows the number of teams that surveyed each site and the total number of species seen at each. Herdsmen Lake and Alfred Cove proved the most popular areas, each having seven of the eight teams try their luck there. Thompsons lake looks good for next year - with just two teams recording as many species as seven teams at Alfred Cove!

The information needs to be read with an understanding of how the rules affected team behaviour. The one team that went to Yanchep had already visited good wetland habitat and therefore totally ignored Loch Mc Ness. Not a single waterbird - not even a Black Swan - appears on the list for Yanchep! Another theory proposes that the avoidance of wetland habitat by this team was related to the \$2.00 entry charge to visit Loch McNess. This theory seems unlikely as, according to Bill Oddies' Little Black Bird Book, even barbed wire fences and antagonistic rangers do not deter a determined birder.

Despite an enormously low probability, two teams visited the SAME three parks! Team A recorded 94 species and won the day, whilst team B scored 69 species - a difference of 25 species. Although some of the 25 extra species seen by team A were species that are hard to find, team B had the misfortune to miss several common species. For example a Port Lincoln Ringneck, a species that team A saw at Alfred Cove.

As the list for the top 10 birds observed is very similar to last year, this year, in Table Two I have listed the birds which were only recorded by one team. If your team saw any of the species noted below, further details would be appreciated as the species noted are generally uncommon in Perth!. Please remember that for many of the sites named below the boundaries allowed extended beyond those normally considered as the site boundaries.

TABLE TWO - Species recorded by one team only.

Species	Site
Spotless Crake	Bold Park
Darter	Kings Park
Lesser Golden Plover	Alfred Cove
Wood Sandpiper	Bold Park
Marsh Sandpiper	Alfred Cove
Sanderling	Alfred Cove
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	Bold Park
Little Egret	Bold Park
Little Bittern	Bold Park
Australian Shoveler	Bold Park
Little Eagle	Yanchep
Whistling Kite	Herdsmen Lake
Australian Hobby	Alfred Cove
Australian Kestrel	Herdsmen Lake
Rainbow Lorikeet	Kings Park
Pallid Cuckoo	Kalamunda N.P.
White-backed Swallow	Yanchep
Dusky Woodswallow	Kalamunda N.P.
Mistletoebird	Kalamunda N.P.
Chesnut-breasted Mannikin	Herdsmen Lake
Red-browed Firetail	Kalamunda N.P.

The Three Park Search will be repeated next year, with a slight change to the rules. Next year the total number of species seen at each site be added up to determine the winning team. This will result in complete, usable lists for each park.

Ron Van Delft

## BOP WATCH

Have you ever struggled to keep alert while travelling the long country roads in our State? Well the R.A.O.U. has undertaken a new project that will relieve boredom and fatigue for the touring birdo - BOP WATCH! Enclosed with this newsletter is a supplement that explains a simple but very useful study on our Birds of Prey. No doubt you've noted quite a few Black-shouldered Kites on some country trips but none on later trips along the same route. BOP WATCH serves to record these changes in a simple, systematic fashion in order that we can better understand and protect our birds of prey.

If you are interested in participating in this project, please contact -

ALLAN BURBIDGE - P.O. Box 312, Wanneroo 6065. Phone: 09 306 1642

## EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

### NEW WARDENS AT EYRE

Last evening, sipping our pre-dinner drinks on the verandah, we gazed at the awesome snowy white sand dunes towering into a sky of gentle colours and were captured by the magic of Eyre. The previous hectic week of packing, renting our house and rushing about doing last minute business and saying goodbyes faded painlessly into the past.

Jan Rhodda, Ben Carr and Rose Farrell very kindly and ably acted as relief wardens for the period between the departure of the previous wardens Nick Dymond and Mary Stewart and our arrival.

Our first week is proving to be a very busy settling in period. We have now mastered the twice daily weather observations, besides the nervousness of broadcasting on the Royal Flying Doctor Radio and the inevitable problem of identifying the clouds. Needless to say 'cloud free days' are now on our list of dreams.

Our first two guests, Bill Graham and Liz White, after working all day on dune stabilization are cheerfully supplying us with their company and appetites enabling us to try out our skills as the hosts and cooks of Eyre.

We wish to express our sincere appreciation to our fellow R.A.O.U. members for their support and encouragement during this period of decision and change for us and especially those who joined us at Diane Beckingham's home for farewell drinks.

We look forward to making all members and their friends welcome at Eyre in 1986.

Jan and Rob Hill

### EYRE COURSE PROGRAM

All courses will run from Sunday afternoon to the following Saturday morning. Cost of courses is \$150 which includes food, accomodation and transport. Families are most welcome.

#### Birding for Beginners

Leader: Steve Keeling

Date: 30 March to 5 April 1986 (Easter)

The course is designed to give beginners a knowledge of how to identify birds. The use and care of binoculars, note-taking in the field and proper use of reference guides and books will be covered. Activities will also include searching for the rare Eyre Throistle-toed Easter Rabbit which should be nesting at this time of year. Come along and not only learn about birds but also have fun.

**RAOU WA Group Excursion to Eyre**  
**Date: 3 to 11 May 1986**

A chance for birdos from the west to go as a group to Eyre to catch up on the ever growing bird list. If you haven't been to Eyre yet - it's a must. If you have been, then here's the excuse to visit again. Special rates apply.

**Eyre's Furry Friends**  
**Leader: Doug Watkins**  
**Date: 22 to 28 June 1986**

Birdos need to broaden their interests! Come to Eyre for the week and have personal introductions to some of the mammals of the southern Nullarbor and Roe Plain. Activities will include looking at cave bats and "drift lining" for Pygmy Possums and Hopping Mice. Why stay at home!

**BRIEF DETAILS OF COURSES FOR SECOND HALF OF 1986**

**History of Eyre Telegraph Station**  
**Leader: Bill Graham**  
**Date: 27 July to 2 August 1986**

**Art Workshop with Donna Reid**  
**Date: 21 to 27 September 1986.**

Drawing and painting the unique scenery, flora and fauna of Eyre. Concentrating mainly on acrylic painting, ink and pastel.

**Birds for Beginners**  
**Date: September 28 to October 4 1986**

Courses on photography and field ornithology are also planned for the second half of 1986.

For further information about the above courses, please contact the Warden at Eyre Bird Observatory. Phone : 090 393 450.

## ROSTRATULA AT VASSE

C.A.L.M. District Manager at Harvey, John Clarke was privileged to observe and handle one of the State's least-observed waterbirds during a recent stroll near Busselton. On the warm evening of 4 February 1986, John was walking beside the Vasse River when a bird flushed from a dry section of swamp about 20 metres from the water's edge. Despite negotiating a grove of paperbarks, the bird fell foul of a barbed-wire fence.

Having a camera handy, John took a snap shot of the stunningly-marked bird before disentangling it. Although it uttered low hissing noises, the bird was largely unharmed and flew away without difficulty.

Considering the dark hood, white eye-mark, long yellowish bill and brilliant golden spots and bars on the upperparts of the bird, John Clarke correctly concluded that it was a female Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*. Males of this species are paler on the head and upper chest than females and males also lack the finely-barred greenish secondary coverts of the female.



Photograph by John Clarke

*This female Painted Snipe became briefly entangled in a fence on the edge of the Vasse Estuary, near Busselton. A rarely-observed species in Western Australia, the Painted Snipe frequents wet grassland and low swamp vegetation.*

Painted Snipe range widely in Africa, southern and eastern Asia and Australia. A smaller species occurs in South America. Few sightings of Painted Snipe have been made in Western Australia. Serventy and Whittell in *Birds of Western Australia* (1976) list old records from Perth (Herdsman Lake), Armadale, Pinjarra, Moora and Bunketch, and single records from the Pilbara and northern Goldfields are mentioned in *The Atlas of Australian Birds*. The Atlas also cites specimens from Derby pre-1900 and reports from the same area in the 1950's. Several sightings were made in the lower Ord River District during the Atlas period. W.A. Museum regional lists include sightings at Wyndham (1909), Carnarvon (1963) and Paraburdoo (1974).

The Vasse sighting is probably the first in southern W.A. for more than 30 years. In south-eastern Australia, Painted Snipe are often found in short wet grass or rush, tall samphire or areas of tussocks. This type of cover is prevalent in the Busselton wetlands, particularly in the SW part of the Vasse Estuary.

Regarded as a nomadic species in Australia, the Painted Snipe could be seen at almost any shallow wetland in the State. Though its behaviour is not well known, it is considered to be mainly a crepuscular and nocturnal feeder.

Perhaps the easily-pronounced generic name *Rostratula* would be better used as the English name of this bird, to reduce confusion between painted snipe and the dissimilar true *Gallinago* snipe. Admittedly, both painted snipe and true snipe are waders that inhabit marshy areas and have cryptic plumage, but thereafter the similarities diminish.

R.J.

## WATERBIRD USAGE STUDIES

### NEW PROJECTS, 1986-88

The new R.A.O.U. - C.A.L.M. contract for waterbirds studies in the period 1986-88 has now been signed. Funds from this contract will cover much of the expense of maintaining the R.A.O.U. Office at Canning Bridge, as well as supporting new research initiatives. These projects have been foreshadowed in previous issues of this newsletter.

The first activity to take place will be the GREAT DUCK COUNT (see article earlier in this issue), though it may well be underway by the time this note reaches you.

Next in our 1986 schedule will be an expedition to remote wetlands in our State. We have tentatively elected to visit the Kimberley Division to count waterbirds using Lake Argyle, in late September 1986. An article on the waterbirds of this enormous wetland appeared in Issue 33 of *W.A. Bird Notes*. Other areas such as Gregory Salt Lake could be incorporated in this expedition, but time, funds and resources will determine the final itinerary. Alternative sites closer to Perth (e.g. Lake McLeod) will be censused if difficulties preclude the Kimberley trip.

I would like to hear from anyone interested in participating in the remote wetland expedition in 1986. We require people skilled in field mechanics, catering, piloting light aircraft and off-road driving as well as experienced observers. A certain amount of camping equipment (e.g. water supply) might be provided, but otherwise participants will need to be financially self-supporting. Size of the expeditionary group will be kept small if resources are limited.

The objective of the exercise will be to assess the importance of the remote wetland for use by waterbirds. Ultimately, remote sites could be nominated for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance, if the criteria for nomination are satisfied.

### SEEDING THE CLAYPIT

Alcoa and the R.A.O.U. have been rehabilitating a clay extraction pit near Baldvis to make it more attractive to waterbirds. Planted shrubs and rushes have shown steady growth and the pit's lake has a rapidly-increasing list of species recorded. Great Crested Grebes and Red-kneed Dotterels were among the birds seen on a recent visit.

An effective method for establishing shrubs at the margins of lakes involves casting seed-bearing tea-tree *Melaleuca* branches into the water. The seed pods release their seeds which then come to rest at various levels on the lake-shore.

Organisers would like to try using this method at the clay-pit lake in late March. Anyone who might enjoy tackling this worthwhile exercise should contact me immediately.

R.J., R.A.O.U. Office, Canning Bridge.

#### CRAKE TRAPPING - 1986

Crakes and rails were trapped at Thomsons Lake from 4-13 January 1986. Water-levels were falling rapidly and little water remained in the rushland by the end of the second week in January. With the invaluable assistance of Clive and Glen Woodhead and Allan and Julie Burbidge, 22 crakes were captured, studied and released. Seventeen were banded - trapping and banding exercises were carried out under permit.

Although similar numbers of birds were caught in two previous seasons, none were recaptured in the 1986 exercise - scarcely surprising! Nevertheless, the ratios of species caught gave insight into the relative abundances of crakes at the lake in January 86: 14 Spotless Crakes, two Australian Crakes and six Baillon's Crakes were captured. Species ratios in crakes sighted near the traps were similar, though the ratio of Australian to Baillon's Crakes was closer to 1:1. A Buff-banded Rail was seen near the trap area.

As in previous exercises, many of the captured birds were juveniles. Seven of the trapped Spotless Crakes were juveniles (e.g. with feathers partly in sheaths) - one was a fluffy black runner. Two Baillon's Crakes were juveniles. These results confirm the importance of Thomsons Lake for breeding by crakes.

#### PACKS OF PECS

Observers around the State have reported unusually high numbers of Pectoral Sandpipers in the 1985-86 wader season. This is possibly due both to increased expertise in identifying these birds and also to greater numbers visiting Australia this season. Basic details of sightings are as follows:

- 9, 9/2, Lake Eda (E of Broome).
- up to 4, 19/12/85-12/1/86, Forrestdale L.
- up to 4, 26/1-2/2/86, Thomsons L.
- 12, 1/2, Mealup L.
- 5, 15/1, McLarty L.
- 3, 25/1, Wonnerup Estuary.
- 27, 13/1, Gore L., Esperance..

Detailed descriptions would need to accompany these records before they would be accepted for publication in a journal of ornithology. The Esperance birds were scattered in smaller groups in flooded samphire.

Wader enthusiasts should take particular care with identifying 'Pecs'. Some Sharp-tailed Sandpipers show longer-than-average bills and many have pale bases to their bills and neatly de-marcated chest streaks. One of the safest features of the Pec is the dark mark in front of (not beyond) the eye, coupled with striking white stripes on the sides of the dark (not rufous) crown and forehead. Getting close views is essential!

#### FURTHER GALLINAGO SIGHTINGS

As in the past two years, *Gallinago* snipe have again been seen in south-western Australia. In addition to the Dunsborough bird in late 1985 (see last issue), a single *Gallinago* was found at Vasse Estuary on 25 January 1986 and another at Bibra Lake on 28 January. These were found by Mal Lewis, R.J. and Michael Craig respectively.

The Dunsborough bird was tentatively identified as a Latham's Snipe on the basis of folded primaries being longer than folded secondaries (the bird was seen closely while feeding) and a long tail tipped boldly with white. The Vasse bird flew with great power and speed and called strongly each time it was flushed (features of Latham's) but showed feet trailing beyond the tail (a feature of Pin-tailed Snipe) in some side views. Close confines precluded good views of the Bibra Lake bird, but its flight was weaker

and slower than either of the first two birds (unlike typical Latham's) and its calls were more typical of a Pin-tailed Snipe (R.J.) - but no trailing toes were seen.

Having viewed all three birds, I would conclude that at least two species of *Gallinago* snipe were involved in these records. Sightings in the south of the State over the last three years have resulted in a confirmed record of Pin-tailed Snipe and several tentative records each of Latham's and Pin-tailed Snipes. Latham's Snipes could reach the SW by migrating to Australia through the North-West or by over-shooting southern S.A. after travelling down the East Coast. The Swinhoe's Snipe occurs in the Kimberley and Pilbara and could also reach the SW.

I would encourage observers to avoid jumping to conclusions on the identity of snipe they have seen, but instead to take careful notes while studying the bird in flight and on the ground for as long as possible. For notes on identification of *Gallinago* snipe, see Issue 33 of this newsletter.

Roger Jaensch

## OBSERVATIONS

The following records have been partly vetted and should receive further scrutiny before publication in R.A.O.U. Reports or in technical journals. Observers are encouraged to submit copies of field notes with all accounts of unusual sightings. The *Atlas of Australian Birds*, Serventy & Whittell's *Birds of Western Australia* and regional lists (e.g. Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne) of the W.A. Museum should be useful guides to records that are unusual with respect to distribution or status.

This series mainly covers the summer of 1985-86. Shire names are given in brackets.

Please send details of sightings to 'The Observations Officer' at the W.A. Office of the R.A.O.U.

#### 1. Southern W.A. (South-West & Eucla)

- |                         |                                                                                    |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Antarctic Prion         | — 1, 3/9, dead at Alfred Cove (metro).                                             |
| Darter                  | — 16, 21/12, Gnornbup Sw (Jerramungup): a small breeding colony was active.        |
| Pacific Heron           | — 17, Sep 85, Jandabup L (Wanneroo).                                               |
|                         | — 25, 22/12, Yellilup Sw (Jerramungup).                                            |
| Cattle Egret            | — 1, Dec 85, Bengier Sw (Harvey).                                                  |
| Great Egret             | — 6, 30/9, Ludlow Swamp (Capel): breeding.                                         |
| Little Egret            | — 2, mid-summer, Wellstead Estuary (Bremer Bay) closing bar: with breeding plumes. |
| Rufous Night Heron      | — 31/12, Hilliup Sw (Jerramungup): 5 active nests.                                 |
| Glossy Ibis             | — 6, 30/12, Thomsons L (metro).                                                    |
| Yellow-billed Spoonbill | — 1, June 85, Alfred Cove.                                                         |
|                         | — 42, Jan 86, Bengier Sw.                                                          |
| Cape Barren Goose       | — 1, Aug-Sep 85, near Bremer Bay.                                                  |
| Freckled Duck           | — 2+, 16/10, Bengier Sw.                                                           |
|                         | — 4, 16/11, Beetalyinna Pool on the Greenough R (Greenough).                       |
|                         | — 12, 31/12, Hilliup Lake (Jerramungup).                                           |
|                         | — 82, Dec 85, Chittering L (Chittering).                                           |
|                         | — 1, 31/1, Herdsman L (metro).                                                     |
| Pacific Black Duck      | — 4500, 30/12, Thomsons L.                                                         |
| Blue-billed Duck        | — 62, 15/12, Bambun L (Gingin): some ducklings seen.                               |
| Square-tailed Kite      | — late October, near Hyden.                                                        |
|                         | — 1, 5/1, Roleystone.                                                              |
|                         | — 1, 24/1, Manjimup.                                                               |

